

Staffing win helping to support students with disability during COVID-19



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The COVID-19 pandemic hit hard our classes and teachers of students with disability. Responsive staff, additional staffing and the loud call for a targeted response to unique site and student needs relieved what threatened to be a disastrous outcome.

COVID-19 has exposed the immense value of the work of teachers, highlighting that teaching is a complex science. This science becomes far more multi-faceted when you add varying, complex student needs to the picture.

Further, the pandemic has revealed the inadequacy of funding for students with disability. This has become clear through challenges such as complicated student health profiles, the central role of health procedures in support settings, the lack of access to embedded allied health, the limited protective measures and inequity of access to technology. Our students also face difficulties such as possible health risks, challenging home learning environments and upended routines.



Teachers across the state have risen to this unprecedented challenge, while managing their own risks, families and home lives. This is especially true of staff across all Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) and Support Units.

In the immediate future, the Department of Education is deploying additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies to SSPs and Support Units. As support settings continue to observe safety measures and create/update risk management and health care processes, members are encouraged to reach out to local Department school services and health and safety teams for support. Any health concerns should also be reported to the principal and the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Hotline. Federation stands ready to assist these schools with any additional requirements. Federation Representatives are urged to be in close contact with their local organiser for swift intervention as required. If this period brings to light other health and safety concerns, support settings are encouraged to demand improvements via the Issue Resolution Procedures and make these known via Federation forums.

Our teachers have gone above and beyond to support students during this time. Their efforts are immeasurable and highlight the importance of a supported and responsive work force, sustainable only through additional staffing. The recently achieved additional staffing provides both the flexibility to meet these challenges and the stability to retain teachers long-term for a greater system-wide understanding of these settings' complexities and needs.

The Time to Act Federation campaign helped secure \$37 million in additional funding for extra staff across all SSPs earlier this year, and it is crucial that this money is used and embedded in school programs and processes to protect its maintenance.

The funding allocation gives schools the ability to employ additional staff beyond their 2020 staffing entitlement. The funding, which equates to at least one teacher per school, could be used to enable:

- access to subjects through employment of subject specialist teachers
- additional release time for collegial programming and collaborative planning
- further provisions for supporting teachers who work with students with complex needs
- effective induction and mentoring to new teachers and those early in their experience with disability
- reduction in class sizes or additional staff in classes, to support specific student needs and/or intensive programs
- time for inter-agency planning with Department officers and external providers
- successful student transition and community access programs
- rapid response to complex student needs and critical incidences throughout the day
- capacity to meet health and safety requirements in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

The Department will be asking principals to provide feedback throughout the year, regarding the use and benefits of the funding for their school. The funding, designed to alleviate staffing pressures in SSPs and inform decision-making about the staffing entitlement for the future, has given schools wider access to support the growing complexity of student needs.

It is imperative this funding remains in our schools for 2020 and beyond. Staffing is the best way to secure additional funds, and additional teachers creating safe, manageable and effective teaching and learning processes are the best way to ensure our students and staff are supported.